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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001147

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2027

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: IZMIR "REPUBLIC RALLY" ECLIPSES

GOVERNMENT'S ERZURUM RALLY

REF: ANKARA 1139 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Kelly Degnan, for Reasons 1.4  
(b,d)

**11.** (SBU) SUMMARY: Sunday's enormous demonstration in Izmir caps a series of "Republic Rallies," in which pro-secular Turks turned out to demonstrate against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The massive crowds and stunning visuals of red Turkish flags against the blue Aegean Sea eclipsed the previous day's pro-government rally in dreary Erzurum, where PM Erdogan and erstwhile presidential candidate FM Gul stood shoulder to shoulder, calling -- like their opponents -- on voters to make their voices heard. END SUMMARY.

"Infidel Izmir" Gives AKP a Message:  
Where You're Going, We Won't Follow

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**12.** (U) People descended on Turkey's third largest city to be counted in what supporters are portraying as Turkey's "red and white revolution." Izmir police tell us unofficially that the pro-republic, anti-AKP rally totaled over a million people, while media estimates range from the hundreds of thousands to two million. Radikal columnist Murat Yetkin commented that the numbers no longer have meaning; a sea of red and white Turkish flags flowed to the Aegean shore, where boats joined in the demonstration from the water.

**13.** (U) Attendees described a hopeful, enthusiastic crowd, with many women and young people. Newspaper photos emphasized women, a few wearing headscarves and many sporting bands proclaiming, "We have my father's (Ataturk's) permission." Slogans included the same repertoire of previous rallies ("Turkey is and will remain secular," "We do not want a sharia state"), referred to the July 22 general elections ("We will not go on vacation before turning off the lightbulb" -- AKP's symbol) and recalled PM Erdogan's 2004 impolitic reference to the traditional CHP stronghold as an "infidel" city ("Infidel Izmir is here, where is Tayyip?"). Attendees included Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal, Democratic Left Party (DSP) leader Zeki Sezer, Labor Party leader Dogu Perincek, Social Democratic People's Party leader Karayalcin, and Hur Party leader Yasar Okuyan. Over 60 NGOs were reportedly involved in the planning, including Ataturkist Thought Association (ADD). A similar

rally in the Black Sea city of Samsun is rumoured for May 20.

**¶14.** (U) The rally also disappointed participants whose cries of "Unite! Unite!" failed to bring together Baykal and Sezer at the podium. Aksam newspaper decried the missed opportunity. While most media emphasized that the crowds kept them apart, Baykal and Sezer's failure to appear together was a symbolic blow to supporters of a center-left alliance. CHP and DSP have since intensified their prolonged negotiations. Columnist Can Dundar foresees that if the left does not unite now, it will be punished at the ballot box.

**¶15.** (U) While the rally was peaceful, a bomb left on a bicycle at an Izmir market on May 12 left one dead and 14 injured. Demonstrators called it a provocation, but as yet, Izmir police have no information on the perpetrators.

Government's Erzurum Rally: Take it To the People

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**¶16.** (SBU) The dazzling images from Izmir eclipsed PM Erdogan's first major public outreach since the military's April 27 e-memorandum. Erdogan, FM Gul, and 11 other ministers turned a mass housing ceremony into an unofficial election rally. Symbolically important in the founding of the Republic, Erzurum is a deeply conservative city in Turkey's far Anatolian east. An overflow crowd of approximately 70,000 people defied the rain in support of the ruling government. As in the anti-AKP rallies, attendees carried Turkish flags -- an effort to reclaim that symbol for all Turkey's citizens, not just those who oppose this government.

**¶17.** (U) Erdogan told the crowd that Turkey's previous

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presidents had all been elected under the same set of rules, but for presidential candidate Abdullah Gul, "obstacles were erected." Erdogan put his faith in the voters, boldly proclaiming that AKP would enter the next parliament with 550 deputies. With his characteristic charismatic oratory, Erdogan proclaimed, "Our fate is one with yours. We are your security, and you are ours. As one motherland, one state, one flag, and one nation, we will emerge as the owners of our own fate. Here on this square are those who believe in democracy; believers in a secular republic, ...the social state, ...the state of law are on this square." He emphasized that Turkey should turn to its people and suggested that "they" (the military and state establishment) are hiding from the nation.

**¶18.** (C) Media coverage of the Erzurum event has been poor; clearly the story of the weekend was Izmir. But, in contrast to rumors of a depressed and bitter Gul, Erdogan and Gul stood smiling side by side on Saturday, apparently filled with election fervor. Erdogan and cabinet intend to continue their outreach in the Turkish heartland, stopping next in Sivas and Amasya. These rallies will not be as glamorous or as momentous as their opposition counterparts, but they will work to bring out the votes by inspiring confidence and enthusiasm among the conservative voters of Anatolia's smaller cities.

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